



Influenza

Influenza (also known as flu) is a very common respiratory disease. Influenza is not what is commonly referred to as “the stomach flu,” which is a term used by some to describe illnesses causing vomiting or diarrhea. Every year, millions of people in the United States get influenza. Influenza often results in more severe illness than other respiratory viruses.

School health professionals should report respiratory illness outbreaks to the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), when 10% of the student population is absent on a given day with respiratory illness symptoms or respiratory illness diagnoses. While childcare settings are not required to report outbreaks, they may also use this link if they would like technical assistance during an outbreak of respiratory illnesses. www.health.state.mn.us/diseases/flu/school/index.html

School health and childcare provider information

Cause

Influenza virus. The two main types of influenza viruses are type A and type B. Within each type there are many related strains or subtypes, which can change every year. This is the reason a person can get influenza more than once and why a person should get vaccinated every year. Influenza usually occurs in the United States between November and April.

Symptoms

Starts quickly with fever, chills, body aches, tiredness, headache, cough, runny or stuffy nose, and sore throat. Illness usually lasts 3 to 7 days. Children may develop ear infections, pneumonia, or croup as a result of an influenza infection.

Spread

When a person with influenza coughs or sneezes, tiny droplets containing the influenza virus are expelled into the air, allowing another person to breathe them in. Also, by touching the secretions from the nose and mouth of an infected person and/or by touching hands, tissues, or other items soiled with these secretions and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth.

Incubation

It takes from 1 to 4 days, usually 2 days, from the time of infection until symptoms begin.

Contagious period

Most contagious during the 24 hours before symptoms begin (very young children may be contagious even earlier), and then children can be contagious up to 7 days and adults generally 5 days after symptoms start.

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Exclusion

Childcare and School settings: Until 24 hours after fever is gone (without the use of a fever reducing medicine) and the child is well enough to participate in routine activities.

Diagnosis

Recommend parents/guardians call their health care provider if their child has a high fever and/or persistent cough. Viral cultures may be taken.

Treatment

Antiviral medications (antivirals) can shorten the course of illness if given within 36 to 48 hours after the symptoms begin. Influenza is a viral illness; therefore, antibiotics will not be effective.

Do not give aspirin or salicylate-containing medications to any child or adolescent under 18 years of age.

Prevention

- Annual influenza vaccinations are recommended for everyone 6 months of age and older. Those at highest risk for influenza include:
 - People with certain medical conditions like asthma, diabetes, and chronic lung disease
 - Pregnant people
 - People 65 years and older
 - Children 2 years and younger

Flu vaccine is usually given in the fall. People who were not vaccinated in the fall may be vaccinated any time during the influenza season. For current influenza vaccine recommendations, check the MDH website at www.health.state.mn.us/immunize

- Cover nose and mouth with a tissue when coughing or sneezing, or cough/sneeze into your sleeve. Dispose of used tissues right away.
- Wash hands thoroughly with soap and warm running water after contact with secretions from the nose or mouth or handling used tissues. **Thorough handwashing is the best way to prevent the spread of communicable diseases.**
- Clean and disinfect commonly touched surfaces (doorknobs, refrigerator handles, water faucets, cupboard handles) at least daily (see Section 2).
- Do not allow sharing of anything that goes into the mouth such as drinking cups, straws, water bottles, or eating utensils.
- Stay home if you are ill. Encourage parents/guardians to keep ill children at home.

For more information, call Hennepin County HSPHD-Epidemiology at (612) 543-5230 or call your local health department.

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